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ABSTRACT

Two projects involving the City University of New York that address problems associated with the transfer of community college students into senior college programs are described. The City University Course Equivalency Project has provided course-by-course information on credit transfer. Two major phases were involved: the evaluation by each senior college of all community college courses for their equivalence, and the dissemination of this information. In addition, a 1983-1984 pilot study of Queensborough Community College students who transferred to City College investigated the current status of articulation agreements, transfer information, services available at the colleges, and student achievement at the senior college. The 91 transfer students were administered a questionnaire to elicit their views on the transfer process and services they felt would improve the transfer experience. Based on the pilot project, the following recommendations are offered: contact between the community college and senior college to develop and implement articulation agreements should be on both departmental and central administrative levels; dissemination of information on articulation policies and practices is important; and ready and early access to articulation information improves students' transfer experience. (SW)

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BRIDGING THE GAP: A CASE STUDY OF COOPERATIVE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE TRANSFER EXPERIENCE*

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INTRODUCTION

The City University of New York (CUNY), the third largest university in the United States, is located in the five boroughs (or counties) which comprise New York City. As an urban university system with two-year, four-year and graduate programs, it affords the opportunity to examine the many issues involved in community college articulation and transfer. CUNY is a commuter university where students can use public transportation to travel between home, work, and school. Its students are typically older and more likely to be working than those at other undergraduate schools. They are also more likely to be Black, Hispanic or Asian and to come from families with low incomes.

The University is an open admissions institution which, as a consequence of explicit policy by its trustees, guarantees a place in one of its colleges to each high school graduate in New York City. The original open admissions policy enacted in 1969 affected access to the senior colleges in two ways: it eased admission to the four-year colleges of the CUNY system and smoothed the way for transfer students to move between the community and senior colleges after completion of the Associate degree. Freshsman classes at the University nearly doubled in the years immediately following open admissions, increasing from 20,253 in 1969 to 40,368 in 1975. (for a more comprehensive discussion of the effects of open admissions, see Lavin, Alba and Silberstein, 1981).

Expansion ended in 1975 and 1976 as a result of the New York City financial crisis. At this time, among many other chantes: tuition was instituted for the first time, senior college funding was shifted from the City to the State government, and senior college admissions standards

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were tightened (see Lavin, Alba and Silberstein, 1981: Chapter 11). By 1977, admissions had dropped by 16% and the University's community colleges began taking an increasing share of each freshman class (for a detailed discussion, see Lavin, Murtha and Protash, 1983).

Today, the original open admissions guarantee of a college place remains; however, that place is now much more likely to be in a two-year program than in a four-year one. A comparison of freshmen classes immediately before the fiscal crisis to those of today indicates the magnitude of this turnabout: in 1975, 48 percent of freshmen entered the community college or two-year programs at four-year institutions. This figure is now 62 percent. For the entire university, freshmen classes dropped by 29 percent, from 40,368 in 1975 to 28,699 today. The greatest portion of the decline occurred at the senior colleges, which have 48 percent fewer students today, while the community colleges lost only 9 percent. Over roughly the same time period, the national scene paralled that at CUNY: the share of all first-time enrollments going to two-year instituions increased from 49.0 to 54.4 percent (Ottinger, 1984:88, 94, 96).

Today, at CUNY and in the nation, students are simply more likely than a decade ago to enter higher education through a community college (see Lavin, Murtha and Protash, 1983). This tilt toward the community college raises personal as well as organizational questions. Will we see relatively fewer bachelor's degrees in the future? Will greater numbers of students shift their aspirations away from the liberal arts and toward vocational programs? We do not have the answers yet. They are currently being worked out by the students who are moving through the pipeline.

Just as it affects the fortunes of students, the prominence of community colleges as the "port of entry" to higher education also works as a structural constraint on bachelor's programs: four-year institutions face a limited market for new students. And, because their budgets depend heavily on enrollment, they must explore new strategies for bringing in students. Since the total pool of high school graduates is declining, the only way to meet this goal is to either bring in greater numbers of non-traditional students or to increase retention, or to do both.

An effective way to boost retention, particularly for a system is to move greater numbers of students from the two-year to four-year programs. As a result, potential transfer students are becoming a valuable resource for the City University. As the traditional pool of entering students declines even further into the next decade the value of the transfer student to a university system such as CUNY will no doubt increase even further.

TRANSFERS AT CITY UNIVERSITY

Approximately 68,000 students, 43 percent of the undergraduate total, were enrolled in Associate degree programs at CUNY this past fall. In recent years transfers total approximately 8,000 each fall and make up

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about one-third of all new students at the senior colleges. The share of new students who are transfers has increased slightly over the past five years, with half of them from within the CUNY system (from senior and community colleges). Those moving from CUNY community into senior colleges are nearly equally divided between those who have completed the Associate degree and those who have not. Recent years have also shown a falloff in the number of students transferring from within the CUNY system and an increase in those moving into CUNY colleges from outside.

There are no precise data as to why outside transfers have increased, though it is probably the case that CUNY's relatively low tuition has attracted some who have been unable to afford rising charges at private institutions. Internal transfers have dropped not because of enrollment declines at the community colleges but, primarily, because today's students are taking longer than those in the past to finish college. Today's CUNY student must very often combine full-time work with college attendance, thereby delaying graduation or transfer.

Without discussing in detail the dynamics of the transfer pool, we can see the limits and possibilities of transfer by looking at the post-graduation experiences of those completing the Associate degree. Studies of recent graduates show that just over one-third of them report attending a Bachelor's program within CUNY, 12 percent attend another Bachelor's program, and 8 percent enroll in technical and trade schools (Murtha, Protash and Kaufman, 1983). We do not yet know how many of these students ultimately go on to complete the BA; however, a number of studies are underway which will examine this issue (see, for example, Lavin, Murtha and Kaufman, 1984). The connection, however, between Associate degree graduates and senior college enrollments should be clear. Associate graduates number nearly 7,000 each year at CUNY. Were the rate of senior college transfer to increase by ten percentage points, an additional 700 students would be added to entry classes at the senior colleges.

Many factors play a role in keeping the number of such transfers where it is: the need to work full time is paramount among the CUNY population. However, there are many positive steps that can be taken to increase the flow of students. Moving ahead in this way has the dual consequence of: expanding opportunities for students in higher education and, at the same time, enhancing the prospects for organizational survival. The rest of this paper discusses two projects which address specifically the problems associated with the transfer of community college students into senior college programs.

We will discuss the City University Course Equivalency Project which is a university-wide effort at providing course by course information on credit transfer. The publication of this information will enable students and counselors to plan programs which cross the levels of the University. Next is a report on a collaborative project by a community and senior college which is tracking the experiences of transfer students. These projects, along with a number of others, address both the needs of students and the concerns of the University.

THE CUNY COURSE EQUIVALENCY PROJECT

In the fall of 1983, the City University of New York began a systematic review of all the University's community college courses for their transferability to senior colleges in the system. The goal of the project is to assemble a listing of course equivalencies in the University and to publish this information in a Course Equivalency Guide. The project represents the first attempt of its kind by the University to compile and disseminate comprehensive course equivalency information.

The project emerged as a result of the University's planning process in 1981-82 involving the presidents and provosts of the University's senior and community colleges as well as the Chancellor and senior administrative officials of the University. CUNY administrators identified articulation as one of the major issues facing the University, and highlighted the serious difficulties encountered by CUNY's community college students as they moved to senior colleges in the system. There was University-wide acknowledgement at that time that comprehensive and complete information on course equivalencies ought to be assembled and made available to the University community. Thus, the project was a response to a clearly identified need in the University and had the unanimous endorsements of top University's administrators, including the Council of Presidents, a University-wide body composed of the 18 college presidents in the University. In addition, the project receipt of a grant from The Ford Foundation provided a major impetus to the University's desire to address problems of articulation and transfer system-wide.

The project has involved two major phases--the evaluation by each senior college of all community college courses for their equivalence, and the dissemination of this information to the University community. In the first phase each of CUNY's 10 senior colleges (Baruch, Brooklyn, City, Hunter, John Jay, Lehman, Queens, Staten Island, York, and Medgar Evers) evaluated the courses from the system's 7 community colleges (Borough of Manhattan, Bronx, Hostos, LaGuardia, Kingsborough, Queensborough, and New York City Technical). Over 4,000 courses were evaluated by each of the 10 senior colleges for a total of 40,000 evaluations. Senior college departments were asked to place each of the community college courses into one of the following categories:

1. Equivalent Course
2. Elective Course
   * Major elective credit
   * Distribution/Core credit
   * Blanket elective credit
3. Not Transferable (not applicable to associate degree graduates for up to 64 community college credits)

The second phase -- preparing the information for university-wide dissemination -- involved developing a database from the equivalency information, and standardizing footnotes accompanying the senior college evaluations. To date, a Course Equivalency Guide in draft form has been printed from the database and distributed to the community and senior colleges for their review.

Over the past year-and-a-half the development of the Guide has proceeded without undue delay or disruption. However, the impending distribution of the information throughout the University has stimulated a number of unanticipated results. The Guide has become the focal point for a number of controversial issues, having broad implications for the University. Because the evaluation process was a unilateral one carried out by the senior colleges, the community colleges were not given the opportunity to have substantial input into how their courses were evaluated. As a result, they were quite anxious about the evaluations in the Guide and were concerned that the ratings of their courses would be viewed as a reflection of their instituiton's quality. Once the draft of the Guide became available, and analyses of the evaluations conducted, it became clear that their concern about the evaluations was unfounded. Approximately 3/4 of all the evaluations rated the community college courses as "transferable" to senior colleges; in addition, none of the community colleges appeared to be treated differently by the senior colleges in their evaluations.

However, before the Guide became available, and partly in response to the concern of the community colleges about the Guide, a policy on articulation was proposed by one of the community college presidents. This policy called for full transferability of all liberal arts and science courses in all programs, departments and in the major. Stimulated by the development of the Guide, this articulation proposal has engendered much discussion and controversy in the University. Both the Council of Presidents and the University Faculty Senate have held hearings on the proposed resolution, bringing together faculty and administrators from the senior and community colleges to present their views on the articulation of community and senior college programs. These hearings have highlighted a number of issues relating to articulation and have raised questions about some of the traditional notions underlying the academy, including faculty prerogative over curriculum, the role of the liberal arts and sciences, student quality and access, and the role of outside accrediting agencies in determining a college's curriculum. The unexpected outcome of the Course Equivalency Project has raised expectations in the University for better articulation between the community and senior colleges. It has also moved the University to begin to talk about problems of transfer, particularly the need for better coordination of community and senior college programs in parallel and related areas.

The project is still in a preliminary stage, and final statements about its impact are premature, given the fluidity of the current situation. It is expected, however, that the ultimate impact of the Course Equivalency Project will result in improved articulation between the University's com munity and senior colleges, and an increase in the number of community college students who seek and attain the baccalaureate degree.

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A STUDY OF THE TRANSFER PROCESS BETWEEN QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE CITY COLLEGE

Partially motivated by the increasing interests and efforts of the CUNY central administration for more effective articulation policies and procedures, representatives from a CUNY community and a senior college designed the following pilot study to investigate the current articulation practices between Queensborough and City College.

The entire population of Queensborough students who transferred to the City College in Fall 1983, Spring 1984 and Fall 1984 were studied to ascertain the current status of articulation agreements, transfer information, services available at the colleges, and student achievement at the senior college. In order to gather these data a number of approaches were used:

1. interviews were conducted with academic advisors from each of the sending and receiving departments
2. student academic records were reviewed at both the community colleg and senior college
3. a questionnaire was mailed to all 91 students

The results of this study are in a preliminary stage, however there are trends which may be of interest to the reader.

Queensborough was the fourth largest CUNY community college feeder institution to the City College during the period under investigation and had provided students with better than average basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills. On analysis of each student's Queensborough program and his/her corresponding City College major was completed. Table 1 indicates the distribution of Queensborough transfers in the City College programs. The results of this analysis indicate a very good "fit" between the Queensborough pre-engineering program and the City College School of Engineering, with 24 of the 27 pre-engineering students, selecting a major in engineering.

Areas in which academic advisors at both institutions expected similar correlations were the AAS Technology programs. These programs offer students terminal degrees after 64 credits and the opportunity to pursue a Bachelor of Technology at City College or another senior college. Students in the Electrical, Mechanical, and Computer Technology programs, who have attained their AAS degree are admitted to the BT program at City and need only to complete an additional 64 credits, since the Bachelor of Technology program was specifically designed for AAS degree students and is available only to transfer students.

Table 1 shows that 69% of the students who followed the Electrical Technology program at Queensborough did not pursue the Bachelor of Technology program at City College. Five of these students would not have qualified to enter directly into the BT program since they had not completed the AAS degree, however, the data clearly indicate that 38% of the students with AAS degrees in ET initially wanted to pursue an engineering degree (BE) at City College. There is a similar trend among the Mechanical

Technology students. Of those 10 students who transferred to City, only four went directly into the BT program. Twenty percent of the students went into liberal arts and four others transferred into a BE program. Likewise, 25% of the students with an AAS degree in Computer Technology chose to major in Engineering.

Knowledge concerning the distribution of Queensborough students among the City College programs provided an essential first step in approaching the respective academic departments. Prior to this study, neither institution was aware of these transfer trends and the apparent movement of technology students into the Bachelor of Engineering program. The faculty at both institutions assumed that Technology students were transferring into the BT program for which existing articulation agreements were suitable. The current data indicate that a significant number of students transfer from technology programs at the community college to follow an engineering major at City College. The majority of these students left Queensborough before attaining their AAS degrees, however, approximately one-third of them had completed their AAS degrees. This information has raised questions about technology students retention, progress, and performance in engineering programs.

The distribution of Queensborough transfer students among City College programs suggested other significant trends. Sixty-six percent of these transfer student choose to major in a department in the School of Engineering, a percentage considerably higher than the overall percent of transfer students to the School of Engineering during that period. In addition, it did not appear as if City College received the expected number of transfer students in its School of Nursing, Bachelor of Sciience program.

Queensborough Community College has a very large nursing program which awards AAS degrees. The City College School of Nursing has never had articulation discussions with Queensborough, although there have been CUNY-wide conversations, and for the three semesters studies only 4 students from Queensborough nursing program have transferred to City. The City College School of Nursing has an RN/BS program for transfer students who have completed the AAS degree and passed the NYS licensing examination. The program builds upon the previous clinical experience of these nurses and also supplements their liberal arts and science background. The RN students follow a separate academic track and this programmatic division has been very successful with AAS students who do not need to repeat courses designed for the first time nursing student. By reviewing the transfer trends from Fall 1983-Fall 1984, it is evident that the RN/BS track is not well known at Queensborough and that City College faculty need to meet personally with Queensborough faculty and students to discuss the advantages of this program.

Another trend which emerged from the distribution data is the overwhelming selection of architecture as a major for students who have studies Design Drafting at the community college. Design Drafting is a technology program leading to an AAS degree. The mathematics and science courses in this program are not as rigorous as those in other technology program (computer, electrical and machanical) and in fact, students completing this program

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who transfer to the BT program need to complete three courses in addition to the 64 credits at the senior college. However, it appears that 82% of students in the Design Drafting program wish to pursue a degree in architecture. Up to this time there have been no official discussions between the two departments, but a preliminary meeting has been scheduled. The School of Architecture is aware that many students from community college drafting programs wish to continue their studies in architecture design, however, the articulation of community college programs with the BS program or Bachelor of Architecture program tends to be difficult and there has been a reluctance to initiate discussions.

The questionnaire sent to 91 students in this pilot study sought their views on the transfer process, issues of concern to them as community college students transferring to a senior college and services these students desired or felt would have improved their transfer experience. The data collected (based upon a 29% response rate) offered the following profile:

--Students did not plan far ahead for the transfer to a senior college. 73% reported that their decision to transfer was made when they were approaching their final semester at the community college.

--Students relied heavily upon community college staff for transfer information. 92% of the students identified either community college counselors or instructors as their source of information and advice about the senior college. Only 12% reported having personal contact with senior college staff prior to filing the transfer application.

--Factors influencing the choice of senior college included availability of the desired academic program (80%); relatively low cost of attendance (57%); the City College's academic reputation (50%); and the number of transfer credits students thought would be granted by City College (42%).

--Few students (11%) reported having received official confirmation of transfer credit awarded by City College prior to first time registration at that school

--The overwhelming majority of respondents rated their academic preparation at the community college in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology. technology, and nursing as adequate for their courses at the City College. However, some dissatisfaction was expressed with their training in writing skills and liberal arts.

--Assessing their experiences at the senior college, 42% of the students indicated they attended a transfer orientation and many of these students felt the information (which included some academic advisement) was helpful. Students who did not attend the orientation were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the advisement they received.

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--36% of the transfer students indicated they had changed their career objectives. The major shift was from a career-oriented technical curriculum at the community college to an engineering or architecture program at the City College.

In a question soliciting comments about their transfer experience students repeatedly recommended several actions to improve the process.

-Information about course equivalencies between the community and senior colleges should be made available to students early on in their course of study at the community college. In particular, optional course sequences within career curricula which articulate with upper division programs should be identified as available and advisable for technology students who are considering advanced study.

-Clearly used to personal contact with counselors and instructors at the community college, students expect more assistance with academic and career planning at the senior college. Frequently cited was a need for more counseling services and individual attention from faculty at the City College.

-The community college should do a better job of preparing students for the changes they encounter at the senior college. Noted were differences in instructional methods and the scope of study beyond the professional core ie, liberal arts and writing courses.

OUTCOMES OF THE PILOT STUDY: ACTIONS TAKEN AND PLANNED

To date all of the departments involved at both colleges have expressed interest in the study and each has begun to consider its implications for articulation policy and practices.

The School of Engineering is interested in looking closely at the population of AAS technology students who transfer to the Bachelor of Engineering program, and to monitor their progress and success rate. Due to other obligations neither faculty has been able to systematically track these students, however, they seem to welcome this new information and may be more receptive to a technology-engineering track, if the results indicate that such students are successful. The pilot study will also provide information to increase the effectiveness of current articulation agreements. Since the professional relationships between the School of Engineering faculty and their community college counterparts were established prior to this study, both schools are committed to continued and strengthened articulation.

The School of Nursing has begun to plan a more aggressive recruitment campaign directed at Queensborough's department of nursing. A City College representative visited Queensborough this month, by invitation of the Nursing Alumni Assciation, to discuss the transfer opportunities at City. The City College nursing faculty indicated it was prepared to

plan some creative outreach efforts, in order to become better known to Queensborough students and faculty. A formal agreement between the City College School of Nursing and Queensborough's nursing program seems highly probable. The faculty at City College feel that the coursework is transferrable, as long as students have attained at least a C in nursing and pre-nursing courses. The first step in the process will be to plan a meeting of the department chairman and the Dean of the School of Nursing.

The School of Architecture has agreed to meet with the chairman of the Design Drafting department at Queensborough to discuss course content and evaluation of student portfolios. Articulation between the Design Drafting program and the School of Architecture may prove to be the most difficult goal to attain. However, the first step of bringing department representatives together has been planned and should lead to greater understanding of community course offerings and senior college methods of portfolio evaluation.

Other senior college departments which may articulate easily with Queensborough departments will be approached. These programs, such as industrial education, management and administration and computer science should consider the advantages they may derive from a closer working relationship with Queensborough. If there is mutual interest for articulation agreements, preliminary meetings will be started.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ARTICULATION POLICY AND PRACTICES

Preliminary findings of this pilot project suggest institutional policies and services to promote cooperation between the community and senior colleges toward articulation agreements.

Contact between the community college and the senior college must be established and maintained to develop and implement a viable articulation agreement. This contact should be on both departmental and central administrative levels. Too often decisions on course equivalencies are made unilateraly by the senior college based upon limited information such as community college course descriptions. Further, transfer credit is not always awarded in a consistent fashion. To reduce these problems, relationships between authorized representatives from corresponding departments should be established. Face to face discussions between faculty, using a variety of information and materials such as course syllabi, texts and examinations provides a more complete and accurate basis for course equivalency decisions. Formalization of the methodology and outcomes of articulation agreements (and the dissemination of such agreements to support staff) improves the consistency of transfer credit evaluation. The identification of a central coordinator for articulation at each campus facilitates the design and implementation of transfer policies. With an institutional perspective on articulation and statistical data on its outcomes, this person can identify emerging transfer trends which have implications for articulation policies in place and planned.

Dissemination of established articulation policies and practices is vital to the credibility and strength of agreements. It is imperative for

departmental faculty, student support staff and administrative personnel in admissions and registrar offices to have accurate articulation information. As noted in the analysis of transfer student survey data, there is a heavy reliance upon community college counselors and faculty for transfer information. At the senior college as administrative staff generally recruit (admissions) and evaluate (registrar) transfer students, communication of articulation agreements to this staff facilitates the transfer process for students through a timely and consistent credit assessment.

Ready and early access to articulation information improves the transfer experience for students. Based upon student responses to the transfer questionnaire, this issue is perceived by students as having the greatest impact on the success of their transfer to the senior college. Obviously the existence of formal articulation agreements is required. Communication of transfer information at the community college may be achieved through a strong academic advisement program, student orientation courses, a Transfer Information Day, departmentally sponsored seminars with speakers from the senior college and a Career Resource Center.

At Queensborough Community College and the City College, the transfer phenomenon continues to grow. 50% of QCC's graduates go on to a four-year college or university. However, in this study, approximately 45% of the QCC students who transferred to the City College did so without a degree. Clearly, increasing numbers of community college students continue study at an upper division school. This requires the community college to consider articulation needs in curriculum design, academic advisement, and counseling programs to enhance student development. At the City College, more than 50% of its gratuates begin their post-secondary studies elsewhere. This trend shows no indication of declining, expecially as the numbers of recent high school graduates continue to taper off. The increase in the proportion of transfer students vis a vis entering freshmen has implications for the areas of recruitment, student services, curriculum and retention.

In light of such developments, it is incumbent upon both the community and senior colleges to examine student and program needs at each level. Cooperation between institutions is vital to establish and maintain program to program articulation and to ensure the success of students who pursue baccalaureate degrees.

Table 1

Comparison of Community College Programs and Senior College Major Choices for Queensborough CC Transfer Students
Spring 1983, Fall 1984 and Spring 1984
(N=91)

Queensborough Programs		CCNY Schools/ Programs Engineering	Tech	Architecture	Nursing	CLAS
Pre-Engineering (n=27)		24	1	0	0	2
Electrical Tech. (n=16)		9	5	0	0	2
Design Drafting (n=11)		0	2	9	0	0
Mechanical Tech. (n=10)		4	4	0	0	2
Liberal Arts (n=9)		2	0	0	0	7
Computer Tech. (n=8)		3	3	0	0	2
Nursing (n=4)		0	0	0	3	1
Non-Degree (n=3)		1	1	0	0	1
Business (n=2)		0	0	0	0	2
Data Processing (n=1)		1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	N	44	16	9	3	19
	%	48.4	17.6	9.9	3.3	20.9

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